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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON SECSTATE VISIT AND  
PRESIDENT'S SPEECH

#### Summary

-- The lead story in all papers today, May 11, is Secretary Powell's visit to Israel and the West Bank.

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Reports highlight the fact that the Secretary met with Abu Mazen, the new Palestinian Prime Minister, and "ignored" Arafat. All reports also highlight Israel's rejection of "any withdrawal that would threaten security".

#### Editorial Commentary

-- "Familiar objectives"

Centrist, influential among the elite English daily Jordan Times (05/11) editorializes: "U.S. President George Bush's initiative for the establishment of a free trade area between the United States and the Middle East might not be original, but it is timely and promising.. Unless solid foundations for peace are laid, free market reforms have few chances. Peace remains a prerequisite for development, prosperity and stability."

-- "America proposes trade openness o Middle East countries"

Daily columnist Fahd Fanek writes on the back page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (05/11), commenting on President Bush's May 9 address at the South Carolina University: "The U.S. President realizes that America's image, as a state biased in favor of Israel and against the rights of the Palestinian people and as a state occupying a very important Arab country, has reached rock-bottom. Arab people must, therefore, be appeased and America's image must be improved in the Arab public opinion. Politically, Bush stressed the need for Israel to deal with the Palestinians with dignity and respect, to stop the settlements and to accept the concept of two states in accordance with roadmap. This is firm language that the Arab side would welcome if it is followed by action. Economically, Bush presented a grand project for establishing a free trade area between the Middle East and America. This is the first step towards reshaping the map of the Middle East.. If the American President wants to bribe the Arabs, then finding a just solution to the Palestinian cause is the way to do that."

-- "Who believes that Powell would succeed"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (05/11): "Very few Arabs would wager on the success of Secretary of State Powell's visit to Tel Aviv.. The bitter reality in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict remains as is. The reason for that is not the brutishness of the rulers of Israel and their legendary steadfastness in the face of pressures, but because these pressures never really paralleled the task, namely ending a 36-year-old occupation, and never compared with the daily crimes that were committed by this occupation against the Palestinian people. In short, the Americans did nothing for the Palestinian cause when they were miles away. So why would they do anything now when they are occupying and controlling the largest and strongest Arab country. We are going to hear how Sharon fought off Powell's pressures, and how Bush plans to receive Sharon to exercise more pressure on him. Many Arabs will believe that. Yet, the fact remains: the occupation is stands with its daily killings and degradation of the Palestinians and the Arab nation. Talk of expected American pressures on Israel to accept the roadmap without amendments is a joke."

-- "Dr. George Bush"

Daily columnist Basem Sakijha writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (05/11): "The speech of President Bush at the South Carolina University may well be the clearest in declaring the American commitment to the political plan vis--vis the Middle East. He speaks of two states, a Palestinian state and an Israeli state. He focuses on democracy in the region. He paves the way for Secretary Powell's regional trip. This straightforward declaration coincides with talk about economic partnership.. Language used in Bush's speech seems to be more firm when it comes to what is required from Israel. This is new. Yet, the region will continue to doubtful of American declarations and announcements until it sees implementation on the ground. Everyone is convinced that without American pressure on Tel Aviv, the current situation would continue to prevail."

GNEHM